CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

Edited by
THE NORTHERN ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE
Sigtuna, Sweden

Director: Dr. HARRY JOHANSSON, Sigtuna, Sweden
Editor: Rev. JOHS. LANGHOFF, Øster Egesborg per Mern, Denmark

No. 23 January 25th, 1957.

Aid to Hungary from the Northern Churches.

During the past few months very considerable sums in aid of Hungary have been collected by a great number of humanitarian and religious relief organizations in the Northern countries. The exact total is not known, but there has probably never before been collected such large funds in aid of one single cause.

Heading the list are the Red Cross organizations in the various countries, but also the special church collections have been very large. Thus, the Svenska Kyrkohjälpen (Swedish Church Relief Committee) received 1,5 million Swedish crowns, Kirkens Nødhjelp i Norge (Norwegian Church Relief Committee) has collected 900.000 Norwegian crowns, and Den danske Folkekirkes Nødhjælp (Danish Church Relief Committee) 800.000 Danish crowns.

As might be expected, the Northern Church Relief Committees work in close co-operation. They have, for instance, together bought a house in Vienna, called the House of the North, which is to serve as a centre for the emigration of Hungarian refugees under the auspices of The Lutheran World Federation and the Austrian Hilfswerk. It has, moreover, been decided to join in paying the salaries of 25 people who are to assist in the distribution of gifts from other countries, such as clothes, food, etc., among the refugees in Austria.

Sweden has received 4.000 Hungarian refugees, while Denmark has received 1.000 and Norway 500. In Sweden all expenses for the refugees are covered by the state, but in Denmark the voluntary organizations pay the expenses for the present. As to Norway and Finland the voluntary organizations have undertaken to provide for a big number of Hungarian refugees in Austria.

Among the Hungarian refugees in Denmark there are two clergymen, the Lutheran minister, Rev. Istvan Gemes from Pécs, and the Roman Catholic priest, Dr. Bela Ispanki, who was formerly the secretary of Cardinal Mindszenty. These two clergymen visit the refugees who are billeted in various places in the country, and also Danish Lutheran and Roman Catholic priests share in the religious care of the refugees. In several places the refugee camps are in charge of church ministers and a clergyman, the Rev. Mads Lidegård, has been appointed Head of a folk high school to be established for the Hungarian refugees in Denmark.

DENMARK

The Visit by the Russian Church Delegation Postponed.

At their meeting in Copenhagen on January 4th the Danish Lutheran Bishops resolved to postpone for the present the dispatch of the invitation previously decided upon for a Russian Church delegation to visit Denmark. The resolution was carried "in view of the circumstance", i.e. on account of developments in Hungary.

In a joint personal letter to the Patriarch of Moscow, the Bishops Fuglsang-Damgaard, Copenhagen, and Erik Jensen, Ålborg, who both took part in the Danish Church delegation's visit to Moscow a year ago, have appealed to him "in the name of Christ to make his great spiritual influence felt in order to safeguard the freedom of the Hungarian people and bring about a just peace and put an end to the sufferings of the nation". So far there has been no direct answer to this communication.

In a New Year's interview in "Kristeligt Dagblad" Bishop Fuglsang-Damgaard was asked whether it is right to keep in contact with the Churches East of the "iron curtain" in view of events in Hungary, to which the Bishop answered,

"The co-operation between the Churches is based on quite other laws than those governing the co-operation between the nations. The Churches are all branches on the same vine-tree and they are all encompassed by the prayer of the Lord, "that they may all be one". They are all members of the same Body, called Jesus Christ, in so far as they themselves profess to be branches on the vine-tree and members of the Body of Christ. I am well aware that the events of the past few months have made it almost inhumanly difficult to maintain contact across the "iron curtain", but I feel that we should very carefully consider the new situation and try to decide what is the most right in the long run."

Bishop Fuglsang-Damgaard refutes the criticism directed against the visit of the Danish Church delegation to Russia. "It was correct that the visit took place", he says. "The Russian Church is able to survive only if it has the necessary spiritual strength and therefore we must keep on praying for it and not give up our fellowship with it." To the question whether it were not possible for a Church to identify itself so closely with a Godless regime that it would be unreasonable to maintain contact with it, the Bishop answers,

"Yes, but I do not feel that this is the case in regard to the Russian Church."

Danish Committee for Contact with the Anglican Church.

At the request of the Anglican Church a committee has been set up by the Bishops of the Danish Lutheran Church which is to strengthen the fruitful contact established during previous years in the course of deliberations concerning intercommunion between the two Churches. The Committee will consist of the same three clergymen as last time, i.e. Bishop Skat Hoffmeyer, Århus, Professor Regin Prenter, Århus, and Dean Paul Brodersen, Copenhagen.

The Voluntary Organizations Must Be the Working Organs of the Church.

In Denmark, as well as in other countries with a National Church, there has, during the past 50 years, been a certain tension between the Church as a public institution and the voluntary church organizations who have taken up, on their own, various kinds of work within home and foreign missions, youth movements, welfare work, etc. In many cases such organizations have been influenced by certain Church sections, but this characteristic of belonging to one particular section has become more and more indistinct during the past few years, as many of the organizations themselves have endeavoured to find as wide a Church support as possible.

At a meeting recently for representatives of a great number of Church organizations, who are members of "Folkekirkelige Organisationers Fællesråd" (Joint Council of National Church Organizations) Bishop Christian Baun, Viborg, strongly advocated that the Church, as such, should regard the voluntary organizations as the legitimate working organs of the Church while, at the same time, the organizations should consider themselves as belonging fully to the Lutheran National Church.

Bishop Baun based his opinion that the time had come for such a new orientation in the relationship between the Church and the voluntary organizations on the fact that laymen, on the whole, become more and more Church-minded, while the characteristics of the various sections and the adherence to tradition, become more and more indistinct At the same time the established Church has acknowledged that it cannot do without the efforts of laymen.

New Bishop of Ribe.

The present minister for the congregation at Askov, Rev. Henrik Dons Christensen, belonging to the Grundtvigian Movement, has been appointed Bishop over the diocese of Ribe in succession to Bishop M.C. Lindegård who died some months ago. Bishop Dons Christensen represents the Grundtvigian section of the Danish Lutheran National Church and has acted as President of the Grundtvigian Youth Organizations for some years. The new Bishop will be ordained at a service in the Cathedral of Copenhagen on Sunday, March 10th.

Methodist Church Approaching the Lutheran National Church?

A section of the Methodist Church in Denmark, predominantly consisting of young ministers, are energetically working for the withdrawal of their Church from the Free Church Council which at present includes five Free Church denominations, i.e. besides the Methodist Church, the Danish Baptist Community, the Danish Mission Community (congregationalistic), the Apostolic Church (Pentecost Mission), and the Salvation Army.

The reason for this action is the fact that the Methodist Church is the only one of the members of the Free Church Council which, as a matter of principle, believes in infant baptism, and it seems unreasonable that the Methodist Church takes part in activities which may easily get the character of being directed against the Lutheran National Church with which the Methodists feel more in accordance than with, for instance, the Baptists. Some Methodist ministers even want the Methodist congregations to be a kind of Free Congregations affiliated with the National Church.

At the annual assembly of the Methodist Church last summer it was proposed to withdraw from the Free Church Council, but at the ensuing ballot it turned out that the majority of three votes were in favour of remaining in the Council. Now the matter will once more be taken up for discussion at the annual assembly this summer, and opinions in regard to the outcome are divided. Some feel certain that the Methodists will leave the Free Church Council, others think that they will remain, but on certain conditions. The President of the Danish Methodist Church, Rev. Niels Mann, Copenhagen, in a statement to "Kristeligt Dagbld" says in this connection,

"It is my opinion that the Free Church Council ought to be preserved and that the Methodist Church should continue to be a member. The Council has practical tasks to solve in regard to the authorities where it is natural for the Free Churches to stand united. But that is all. There is no reason for the Council to arrange meetings etc. as is the case at present. The Evangelical Alliance will look after such matters.

Christianity Must Be Introduced Into Politics.

The former Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ole Bjørn Kraft, in an article in the paper "Frihed og Fællesskab" (Freedom and Fellowship), says,

"In my opinion Christianity must find its way into politics - a politician who professes to be a Christian, in the same way as a businessman, a physician, or a teacher who professes to be Christian, ought not to keep his Christianity apart from his political decisions. I feel that we have been far too reserved and that the uncertainty among Christian clergymen and laymen concerning political developments is partly responsible for this. I would like to see in the future that we fight more openly and directly for what we really believe. We must consider the problems of the day in the light of our Christian faith. We must be a reaction - which is not the same as being reactionary - to the destruction by our time of the Christian ideals. Wherever we come across points of view in literature, in dramatics, in public life, in education, which are an expression of a philosophy which offends the faith in the Divine and are a debasement of man, we must openly oppose them. We must have courage enough to go against the current in order to turn it. But in such a struggle we must never forget the Commandment about charity and that the first change necessary is the change of ourselves."

Ole Bjørn Kraft, who is one of the leaders of the Conservative Party, is against the idea of a particular Christian Party. He says in this connection,

"It is no more possible to monopolize Christianity than it is to monopolize being Danish. Christianity is not a Party manifesto. It may seem a paradox, but Christianity does not always lead individual people to the same political standpoint in daily life, although I believe that it leads to unity in essential matters. We must not be open to the unfortunate misunderstanding that Christianity and a certain political point of view are always identical. But I do believe in a Christian fellowship across all political divisions and ideas and in the necessity of making such a fellowship a real thing."

FINLAND

President Paasikivi - a Gift From God.

The funeral of the former Finnish President, Juho Kusti Paasikivi, who died last month at the age of 86, took place in the Storkyrkan in Helsinki (Helsingfors) and was attended by an overwhelming number of people. The Archbishop Ilmari Salomies preached at the service.

The text chosen by the Archbishop was taken from Genesis, chapter 24, where it says, "The Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master". He mentioned how the way of the President had sometimes been favoured by fair wind, sometimes by head-wind. The happy times had been like a few rays of sunshine from a sky, covered with dark clouds, but even though the journey had been hard and burdensome, it had, nevertheless, been a happy journey because the traveller was allowed to serve his country and to see this country prosper and go forward to victory, in spite of hardships and disaster.

The Archbishop called to mind how often President Paasikivi had emphasized that in the last instance it is God who holds the fate of the nations in His hand. This trust in the guidance of God was nourished by a never-failing interest in history, but its deepest roots were to be found in the Word of God which he studied regularly throughout his life.

Bishop G.O. Rosenqvist who, together with Bishop Elis Gulin also assisted at the funeral, in a statement to "Församlingsbladet" (Congregational Times) says,

"The merciful care of God for our nation is evident in the fact that at the most critical periods in the history of our country we have had men who were equal to the great demands of the moment upon their far-sightedness, wisdom, and courage. Among the men who seem to be a direct gift from God we count President Paasikivi. To great sections of our people it has also been a source of grateful joy to see how the great statesman in a very personal manner shared their faith in God and Christian outlook on life. His intimate knowledge of the Bible, his interest in theology and the Church, and his public speeches have born witness to this effect."

The Importance of Freedom and Independence Emphasized.

"The shocking events in Europe shortly before the Finnish Independence Day have made us realize the great importance of our freedom and independence," Dean Jaakko Haavio writes in the Christian newspaper "Kotimaa". He recalls a statement by the first Finnish historian, Yrjö Koskinen, "Patriotism constitutes half of our religion", and continues, "The autumn now gone past has strongly emphasized once more the importance of patriotism in the life of a nation."

Modern Church Architecture Being Discussed.

During the past few years the congregations in Helsinki (Helsingfors) have built several churches, church working centres, and funeral chapels which have been strongly influenced by the conquests of modern architecture. This is the reason for the discussion started by Torsten Aminoff, M.A., at a recent meeting for members of parochial councils

in Helsinki (Helsingfors) with the question whether a church ought not to "look like a church".

The matter has been lively discussed and it has been pointed out that every historical period ought to strive at creating its own architectural style, and that the medieval ashlar churches, the cruciform churches of the 17th and 18th centuries, and the new-gothic temples of the 19th century are no more genuinely Finnish than, for instance, churches in modern style. That the art of building has greatly advanced technically is also evident in the style of building.

A young architect expresses his view on the matter in this way, "Where the interest for church architecture is genuine, the understanding will arise of the deep concord which must exist between the inner erection of ideas in the Church and the architecture enclosing them."

"Are You Going To Be Divorced - Call Number xxxxx First, Please!"

Some time ago a small advertisement might be found in one of the Helsinki (Helsingfors) papers which ran, "Are you contemplating divorce although you have children? Then, please, first call number xxxxx!" The advertisement was inserted by a married couple who, together with some good friends, has been trying for the last few years to do something for their fellow-men whose marriages are about to suffer shipwreck. As it turned out, there was great need of such a service. The first two days after the appearance of the advertisement hundreds of people called who wanted to discuss their difficulties with those who had inserted the advertisement.

One of the couples acting as adviser and helpers has been anonymously interviewed by the weekly paper "Forsamlingsbladet" and in this interview they state that the most common cause of matrimonial conflicts, according to their experience, is not alcohol, but rather a lack of mutual confidence. The disagreements are often due to mere trifles and the very act of speaking plainly to one another and to other people may clear away many misunderstandings.

The couple relates that the part played by themselves often is the one of just listening, but they also share their experiences with those who seek help. They themselves went through a critical time in their marriage some years ago, but found the solution to their problems through Christianity. In the first place they do not speak much of Christ and the importance of Christianity, but rather of the importance of confidence, frankness, and forgiveness, and of beginning with one's failings rather than with those of the partner. Later on it may seem natural to speak openly of Christ and it sometimes happens that they go to Holy Communion together with those who ask for help in solving their problems. A positive result is not always achieved, but the cases of failure are most likely fewer than those which are successful, the couple states.

Interesting Evaluation of Morning Prayers in the Radio.

The morning prayers, held in Swedish, in the Finnish radio have been critically evaluated by Dr. Tor Krook in the paper "Vasabladsmannen". He comes to the conclusion that out of 32 broadcast services, 12 were "good" and 15 "satisfactory" while none were of lower quality.

Dr. Krook has judged the services on the basis of contents, diction, pitch of voice, etc., and of the four services which obtained the highest number of points, 10, two were conducted by women. Sixteen services obtained 9 points, ten got 8, and five received 7 points.

NORWAY

Members of Delegation to Minneapolis Appointed.

The National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation has appointed the 12 Norwegian delegates to the Lutheran World Conference in Minneapolis in August. They are:

Bishop Johannes Smemo, Oslo; Dr. Conrad Bonnevie-Svendsen, former Minister of Church Affairs; Professor Nils Alstrup Dahl; S. Fougner, bank manager; Kristian Hansson, director of the Government Department on Church Affairs; Bjarne Hareide, M.A.; John Haug, civil engineer; Rev. Henrik Hauge, head of the Norwegian Inter-Church Institute; Berit Iversen, teacher; Oddrun Kirstad, M.A.; Tormod Vaagen, secretary general; and Professor Leiv Aalen.

The Bishops Wish the Churches to Be Open on Weekdays.

The Norwegian Bishops have backed up a request by Hamar diocese last year that the churches, as far as possible, are kept open on weekdays. A number of churches, especially in the towns, are always open, but this number will probably now be greatly increased. The Bishops state that they are aware that open churches involve certain practical difficulties, such as the cost of a permanent attendant and the heating of the churches during winter. However, the cathedral chapters are requested to investigate the possibilities in the individual dioceses and to give the local church wardens guidance as to the best arrangement. At the same time the Bishops recommend that not only should the churches be kept open on weekdays, but the visitors should also be helped in their devotions by, for instance, placing copies of the Bible and suitable prayer-books in the churches.

The Statutes of the New Institute on Parish Work Published.

After a trial period of almost a year the statutes have been drawn up for the new Institute on Parish Work established last year by the Diocesan Councils, which was noted with great interest, not only in Norway, but also outside its borders. The section in the Statutes dealing with matters of principle, approved by the Bishops and now being considered by the Diocesan Councils, reads as follows,

"The Norwegian Institute on Parish Work is based on the Word of God and the Confession of the Norwegian Lutheran National Church. Its purpose is, within the boundaries of the National Church, to find ways and to give inspiration for bringing the Gospel farther out among people and to utilize inactive energy in the cause of the Kingdom of God. The aim of the Institute is to help the individual to faith in Christ, to lead him into the Christian community with its help and services, here to find his special task and to come to see his life in the light of Christianity. In order to achieve this goal the Institute wishes to have the widest possible co-operation with both the stipulated and the voluntary organs for Christian activity in the Lutheran National Church. The Institute will work for the strengthening of unity in the local parishes and thereby increase the propagating and preserving forces of the Church as a whole. The practical tasks of the Institute will mostly consist in arranging courses, lectures, etc., in order to further the life and work of the local parishes and the Church as a whole, as well as in establishing contact with groups of people who ordinarily are not reached by the Christian message."

Noteworthy New Social Democratic Cultural Programme.

The Cultural Committee of the Norwegian Social Democratic Party has published a programme which has caused attention, not the least on account of the sections concerning Church matters. Thus, for the first time, the Government Party officially goes in for continuing the religious instruction in public schools. It says in this connection,

"The question has been raised whether, as a matter of principle, it is right to give the Christian religion an exceptional position in the curriculum. Christianity, however, is part of our heritage and an essential part of our whole cultural structure. Therefore it ought not to be removed from the schools. But wherever the instruction in religion in a school breeds intolerance, the instruction must be reorganized. Children and young people should not grow up with the hateful attitude and the specifically provincial opinion that only those who in every respect acknowledge the teachings of Augustana are the children of God."

As for the system of a national church the Cultural Committee states that it may prove to be a guarantee of religious freedom, in as much as the Cabinet Council, headed by the King, is the highest authority of the Church.

The Programme goes on to say that religious tolerance must also result in giving the same public grants to the Free Churches as to the National Church, graduated according to the number of members of the various denominations. If this principle comes into force it will mean a new practice in Norway.

Welfare Workers Among Children Ought to Receive Religious Instruction.

In a communication to the Social Department of the Government from the Norwegian Bishops it says that also religious instruction should be included in the training of welfare workers among children. This is in opposition to the majority of a committee which some time ago sent out a declaration concerning the training of welfare workers among children, in which it said that such an instruction was unnecessary as the children were taught religion in school. The Bishops, however, emphasize, in agreement with the minority of the committee, that the number of kindergartens and similar institutions is on the increase during these years and that it is, therefore, of importance that the children who come here also receive a suitable instruction in religion. On the other hand, the Bishops agree with the committee that welfare workers who are not members of the Norwegian Lutheran National Church should be exempt from such an instruction in religion if they wish.

While the majority of the said committee is in favour of the State taking over the establishment and the running of all institutions for the training of welfare workers among children, the Bishops declare themselves in accordance with the minority of the committee, claiming the right of private groups to establish and run such institutions. It is felt that the recommendation of the majority might result in a uniformity which, in the long run, would constitute a threat against the democratic principles as well as the freedom of conscience. But the condition must be, of course, that the private institutions fulfil all educational requirements.

SWEDEN

300 New Churches Being Planned for in Sweden.

The need for at least 300 new churches will arise during the next decade in Sweden, it is stated by Rev. Gunnar Rudborg, Göteborg, who for some months has been investigating the need for new churches in the country. The greatest need is in the diocese of Växjö where the erection of more than 30 new churches is being planned for while the small diocese of Visby is the one with the fewest church projects, i.e. only two. According to Bishop Ljungberg there ought to be built some 30 new churches in Stockholm in order to cover the present need, and in Göteborg the erection of four new churches is being planned.

Extensive Inter-Denominational Revivalist Campaign Launched in Stockholm.

On January 10th the most extensive inter-denominational revivalist compaign for several years was launched in the Blasieholms Church in Stockholm. Back of the campaign are the Lutheran National Church as well as many Free Churches. The meetings are led by the so-called "Ako-Team" (All Kristen Offensiv), made up by representatives of the various denominations, which has conducted similar revivalist campaigns in a number of other Swedish towns. Every week in the near future there will be meetings in the Blasieholms Church from Tuesday to Saturday while Sunday and Monday are free in order to leave time for the individual congregations for their own activities. In the course of the past few months 250 men and women have been trained to visit, two by two, the homes of Stockholm with an invitation to the meetings, and other 700 people have been instructed so that they may be able to give personal assistance to those who might be called to a personal faith through attending these meetings. Half of these assistants belong to the National Church and the rest to the Free Churches, and great care is taken that people who are converted at the meetings are received into the congregation where they would naturally belong.

The Clergymen in Örebro Establish Round-the-Clock Duty.

The clergymen in the Swedish town of Örebro have agreed to establish a "day and night duty", similar to that of the physicians, so that people who might want the personal assistance of a minister should not refrain from calling him on account of the inconvenience of the time of day. One of the ministers will always be on duty so that he may easily be sent for.

The plan which has been approved by the town's parochial councils has been received with acclamation by the Christian paper "Morgon-bladet" which feels that the idea is of value, not the least when taking into account the frighteningly high percentage of suicides.

Appeal for Intercession for Dag Hammarskjöld.

The weekly paper "Svensk Kyrkotidning" in a leading article appeals for intercessions for the Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, who, as is well known, is of Swedish extraction. It says in the leader,

"The power, or lack of power, of the United Nations to solve inevitable conflicts in a peaceful way is highly dependent upon the

strength of one man. When we Swedes here at home wish to help him, but can see no rays of light in the gloomy darkness of the present time, we have, in the end, no other possibility than to intercede in prayer. Yes, I said, "in the end"! By this I do not mean that prayer is the last resort in this world. But it is, unfortunately, true also of Christian people that we first consider the practical measures, more or less impossible, and only in the last end turn to prayer.

When we centre our prayers around "peace on earth", then let us think of the man of Swedish origin who has had the problem of the peace of the world placed heavily upon his shoulders."